



# Utah's Legislators Back to School

-a year round civic education program-

---

---

## BACKGROUND and BACKBONE America's Legislators Back to School Program

### Why a Legislators Back to School Program?

Legislators Back to School is designed to help students understand the pressures and conflicts that legislators face, and to help legislators understand how students feel about issues that affect their lives. To meet these objectives, legislators and students engage in meaningful discussions, participate in mock sessions or simulated public hearings, and draft bills together. Students learn to better understand and value their responsibility for constitutional freedoms and prepare themselves to be educated voters and leaders as they become civically involved on the local, state, or national level.

Because of the growing distrust in government and decline in voting across the nation, especially among young voters, a civic education initiative was launched. Congress passed a bill in December of 2001 that earmarked \$2 million for a projected five-year civic education project, Representative Democracy in America. The project, funded by the U.S. Department of Education by act of Congress, allows monies to the following three project partners: NCSL (National Conference of State Legislators), CCE (Center for Civic Education), and Center on Congress at Indiana University.

Money funded to NCSL goes directly to the Trust for Representative Democracy and funds the materials produced for use by legislators when visiting classrooms across the nation as part of America's Legislators Back to School Program. NCSL established America's Legislators Back to School Week in 1999 as a pilot program and asked several states to participate. In 2000, it spread nationwide and Utah was introduced to the program. In 2005, it became a year-round program to provide scheduling flexibility to legislators and schools. Each state may personalize the program name, thus Utah's Legislators Back to School Program.

### How does Utah rank?

#### 2006-2007

Utah ranks #2 in the nation with 80 percent legislator participation (83 legislators). Massachusetts reported 100% participation, a first for any state to accomplish since the program's inception.

#### 2005-2006

Utah ranked #1 in the nation as legislator participation climbed to 81 percent, and participating students climbed to 18,210 in 220 schools.

#### 2004

Utah remained in the top three nationwide; 74 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* July/August 2005). Legislators reached even more students than the previous year climbing to approximately 17,200 in 200 schools.

#### 2003

Utah ranked #2 in the nation; 68 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* January 2004). Legislators reached approximately 16,500 students in 165 schools.

#### 2002

Utah ranked #1 in the nation in 2002; 92 percent of the Legislature participated (*State Legislatures* March 2003). Legislators reached approximately 9,000 students in 90 Utah schools in 2002. Legislators, judges, and attorneys joined together in the Dialogue on Freedom program that was initiated by the Utah State Bar to benefit students following the tragic events of 9-11.

## How does Utah encourage participation?

The Utah State Legislature has passed a concurrent resolution urging the participation of schools and legislators in this valuable civics education program for the past five years. A concurrent resolution, by definition, expresses the position of the state on a specific matter and has the prior support of the governor.

2007 - SCR 2, Resolution Promoting Utah's Legislators Back to School Program (*Sen. Margaret Dayton*)  
2006 - HCR 2, Resolution Promoting Utah's Legislators Back to School Program (*Rep. Margaret Dayton*)  
2005 - HCR 6, Resolution Recognizing Utah's Legislators Back to School Program (*Rep. Margaret Dayton*)  
2004 - HCR 7, Resolution Recognizing Legislators Back to School Week (*Rep. Kory Holdaway*)  
2003 - SCR 3, Resolution Designating Legislators Back to School Week (*Sen. Howard Stephenson*)

Every year principals and district superintendents receive a letter from legislative leadership encouraging them to invite legislators into their school classrooms so students and legislators can engage in meaningful discussions and activities.

A fall packet is given to each legislator containing: copies of letters sent to principals and superintendents; a personalized letter from leadership emphasizing the value of civic education and encouraging the legislator to interact with students; and samples and descriptions of NCSL's supplemental materials and evaluation forms.

The program coordinator provides motivational reminders to legislators throughout the year, correspondence including Internet links to key teacher contacts throughout Utah via the Project Citizen coordinator or USOE contact, writes articles for the *Interim Highlights*, posts information on the Legislature's Web site, and prepares news releases.

For teachers and principals, the Utah's Legislators Back to School Program Web site provides detailed information about how to best prepare students for a valuable hands-on civic education experience with a legislator.

## Web sites of Interest

**Civic Education - Utah's Legislators Back to School Program** - <http://www.le.utah.gov/lrgc/backtoschool.htm>

**Description of Supplemental Materials** - <http://www.le.state.ut.us/lrgc/backtoschoolinfo/supplementalmaterials.pdf>

**How to Schedule a Classroom Visit** - <http://www.le.state.ut.us/lrgc/backtoschoolinfo/howtoschedulevisit.htm>

**Lesson Plans K-12** - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/lessonplans.htm>

**Overview of America's Legislators Back to School Program** - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/bksdesc.htm>

**Partner Organizations for America's Legislators Back to School Program** - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/partners.htm>

**State Stats: Top Ten Legislature Participation** - <http://www.ncsl.org/public/trust/topten.htm> (*Note: 2003 statistics in State Legislatures January 2004 should reflect Utah legislator participation at 68 percent*)

**The Center on Congress at Indiana University Interactive Web site for Kids** - <http://www.democracykids.org/>

**Trust for Representative Democracy** - <http://www.ncsl.org/trust/>

For additional assistance, contact Shelley Day, Legislative Information Liaison  
Coordinator for Utah's Legislators Back to School Program  
Legislative Research Library & Information Center  
Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel  
801-538-1032, 801-326-1600, or [shelleyday@utah.gov](mailto:shelleyday@utah.gov)